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The Theology of the Body in the Life and Ministry of Priests  
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Conference 9: Guiding the Young toward the Gift of Self in Christ-like Love

- Introduction
  - Before the break, we pondered Blessed John Paul II's reflections on how Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel put the theology of the body in color on the vault (creation and the fall) and behind the altar (the eschatological last judgment). John Paul II wrote it to remind the Cardinals, and through them, us, Christ's priests, that this message has been entrusted to us. It's important for us not only to live this Gospel of Human Love in the Divine Plan, but to pass it on to others. That's what I'd like to sketch out here today in our last conference, as we prepare at the end of our days here in Harrison to return home to our parishes and assignments strengthened by contemplating the Father's love in Christ and feeling drawn to enter into that love ever more by passing it on.
  - Ideas have consequences only if we make them have consequences. For the treasure trove of the theology of the body to have the impact Blessed John Paul II hoped for and intended, it must be made practical in the lives of believers. People must be set on the path of the redemption of the body by living according to the Holy Spirit in purity of heart. This applies to everyone, but obviously one of the richest applications of that new life is in the area of the formation of young people to be ready to say yes to the vocation to love that God has given them in the priesthood, religious life, consecrated lay celibacy, or for most of them, in marriage.
  - This conference is dedicated to how Blessed John Paul II sought to prepare young people to receive his teachings on the theology of the body. For obvious reasons of complexity and chronology, he couldn't give them all of the thoughts the way they were formally developed later, but he did give them a certain propaedeutic preparation, a "pre-catechumenate" that would get them ready to receive the theology of the body on good fruit and bear 30, 60 or 100 fold. He sought in various steps to inspire them to recognize and respond to their vocation to receive the love of God and others, remain in that love and reciprocate that love. Doing this, he told us in his 1994 book length interview "Crossing the Threshold of Hope," was "one of the fundamental themes" of his entire priesthood.
  - He described that the "memorable experience" of his early years as a priest "was the discovery of the fundamental importance of youth." He recognized that youth was "not only a period of life that corresponds to a certain number of years" but "a time given by Providence to every person ... as a responsibility. During that time, he searches, like the young man in the Gospel, for answers to basic questions; he searches not only for the meaning of life but also for a concrete way to go about living his life. This is the most fundamental characteristic of youth. Every mentor, beginning with parents, let alone every pastor, must be aware of this characteristic and must know how to identify it in every boy and girl. I will say more: He must love this fundamental aspect of youth."
  - The "fundamental problem of youth," he said, is to discover who he or she is and to find love. He was one of the chief architects of the beautiful Christian humanism of Gaudium et Spes, the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which taught the two most necessary elements of self-discovery, which are even more acute during the period of youth. These are, as we heard in the introductory conference of this retreat :
    - GS 22 — "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. ... By the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, [Christ] fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.
    - GS 24 — Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself

- “Young people,” he said in Crossing the Threshold of Hope, “know they must live for and with others, they know that their life has meaning to the extent that it becomes a free gift of self for others. Here is the origin of all vocations.”
- As we talked about yesterday, he said he “felt almost an inner call” from early in his priesthood to help the young learn how to respond appropriately to their vocation to love, to teach them how to love by helping them learn from Christ, the revelation of the father’s love, and to enter into his nuptial love and teaching them how to give of themselves sincerely and unselfishly to God and others.
- “As a young priest,” he declared, “I learned to love human love. This has been one of the fundamental themes of my priesthood — my ministry in the pulpit, in the confessional and also in my writing. If one loves human love there naturally arises the need to commit oneself completely to the service of “fair love,” because love is fair, it is beautiful. Young people are always searching for the beauty in love. They want their love to be beautiful. If they give in to weakness, following models of behavior that can rightly be considered a scandal in the contemporary world, in the depths of their hearts they still desire a beautiful and pure love.”
- But their hearts are restless, often seeking for meaning, for love, for self-giving, in wrong places rather than in right ones. For this reason, he said, “They need guides and they want them close at hand.” That’s what he sought to be, a guide close at hand to the young, in his work as a chaplain at St. Florian’s and a professor at the University of Lublin, as a priest and bishop leading them on mountain hikes, or the strenuous interior climb of retreats, and even as a pope, through World Youth Days and get-togethers on every parish visit and every apostolic pilgrimage.
- John Paul II sought to help the young recognize that “only God can give them this love” and to help them to become willing to “follow Christ” in this pursuit and realization of truly beautiful love, “without caring about the sacrifices this may entail.” He also endeavored to get the Church, including his brother bishops and priests, to have a “profound understanding of what it means to be young,” to “fall in love with human love,” to help the young seek and find Christ in the Church, and to recognize that in the Church Christ walks “alongside each generation, ... alongside each person as a friend,” a “Friend who will not disappoint him [and] on whom he can always count.”
- As shown by the vast crowds whom he met at World Youth Days, who made his funeral the largest in human history, who raised their high-pitched voices in shouts of “Santo Subito,” who have taken across the world to Love and Responsibility and the Theology of the Body, the young people of the Church demonstrated a great openness and hunger for this message and ministry.
- But it’s not enough just to be excited by a message that responds to one’s deepest yearnings. Jesus himself warned against that in his parable of the sower and the seed, referring to those with rocky soil who initially receive the word with joy but who don’t allow that word to take root so that when worldly cares or anxieties or the lure of pleasure arise, the seed withers and dies for lack of roots. It’s important to till the soil, to help the seed go deep, to water it. Blessed John Paul II showed his real practical side in his pastoral plan for the third Christian millennium when, after saying that everything the Church does must be set in relation to the universal call to become a saint, he said that this vocation must in turn become a task and that the Church must become a “vocational school,” training people step-by-step how to become a saint just as much as a vocational-technical school trains someone to be a carpenter, plumber or electrician. He described the courses in the typical training school of sanctity as grace, prayer, Mass, confession, hearing the word of God and passing that saving word on. What, we can ask, ought to be the pillars of the training of young people to love, to realize and respond to the nuptial meaning of their lives?
- This is a subject to which I’ve spent much of my priesthood. It began when I was a Catholic high school chaplain. It was an inner city school with a lot of inner city issues. Many of the students came to the school not for its religious instruction, but because it was safer and better than the public schools. Formed in many cases by the attitudes of their non-practicing parents, few were enthusiastic about the things of God. They looked at the Church as “boring,” as a “whole bunch of rules,” as something that seemed to “repress” rather than liberate and make possible their deepest

aspirations. I tried all different types of approaches, but none seemed to reach many of the young students. So I began to study systematically what John Paul II said to and about young people. Eventually my binder grew to over 450 pages. Then eventually it grew to 3200 as I studied page-by-page the 57 thick volumes of the *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*. The more I read his discourses, the more I started to see how his approach created a type, a tone, an inspiration that mine, despite my best intentions, didn't. The more I focused on his themes and vocabulary, the more my themes and lexicon began to change. It started to reorder the way I was interacting with young people and I started immediately to see fruits. What Blessed John Paul II bequeathed us was not just academic or theoretical insights, but pastoral and practical wisdom. He left us a pedagogy, a way of meeting and accompanying young people along their journey of the discovery of who they are and are called to become in God's plans and with God's help.

- What I'd like to do in this last conference is to condense what he said and did in his interactions with young people to ten pastoral tips, ten fundamental approaches, toward encouraging young people toward the gift of self that we can emulate as priests. I hope that they will be of obvious practical application to us not only in preparing young people for marriage but in our ministry to youth in general. Insofar as we all have to become younger, in fact like little children, to enter into the kingdom of heaven, however, I hope that these ideas of our late Holy Father, will give us all a spiritual rejuvenation and added spur to our own vocation to love!
- Ten Lessons
  - **(1) Befriend the Young**
    - He had said in CTH: "If the young turn to authority figures, they do so because they see in them a wealth of human warmth and a willingness to walk with them along the paths they are following."
    - He called them "dear friends" over and over and meant it.
      - Boston 1979: I want to meet you and tell you all—men and women of all creeds and ethnic origins, children and youth, fathers and mothers, the sick and the elderly—that God loves you, that he has given you a dignity as human beings that is beyond compare. I want to tell everyone that the Pope is your friend and a servant of your humanity.
    - He enjoyed their company. He loved spending time with them. He said it was never a duty but a joy. Friends spend time together, they listen to each other, trust each other. He made a commitment to spend time with them. That is what he tried to do not only on World Youth Days, but in the hundreds of audiences he would have in Rome and during every apostolic journey with young people.
    - He phrased his interaction with them as one of "accompaniment," walking alongside young people as they make the pilgrimage of life. He wanted to be with them in their joys and sorrows, the ups and downs. He wanted to be their "companion" along the journey.
    - As friends, he made a commitment to show them he loved them.
      - To Irish pilgrims, 9/7/81: "I want to assure you once more of my love for you, and of the hope and confidence."
      - He said that this love needs to be present in all our interactions, just like in Christ's interactions with young people. In 1985, during the U.N.'s International Year of Youth, he wrote a beautiful Holy Thursday letter to priests in which he said that our pastoral effectiveness comes from looking on young people with deep and sincere love.
        - "The first and most profound source of their effectiveness has been that 'loving look' of Christ. ... With young people, this love is not something exclusive, as if it did not also concern others, such as adults, the old, the sick. ... At the same time, ... it flows from a particular concern for what being young means in human life... This love for young people is fully conscious both of the qualities and of the defects proper to youth and to young people.

At the same time, this love — just like Christ’s love — reaches the person directly precisely through these qualities and defects. It reaches the individual who is at an extremely important phase of life. Many things, in fact, are determined and decided at this phase (sometimes in an irreversible way). The future of a person depends to a great extent upon the nature of that person’s youth... This time of youth therefore in the life of every person is a particularly responsible phase. *Love for young people is above all awareness of this responsibility and readiness to share it.*” (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)

- He says the Church must have a preferential love for young people because Christ did, seen not only in his allowing children to be permitted to come to him, but also in the millstones he announced would await those who led the young astray.
- Like a friend, he made himself accessible and approachable.
  - He said to priests, but it can apply to anyone, “The Gospel text [of the RYM] indicates that the young man had easy access to Jesus. For him, the Teacher from Nazareth was someone to whom he could turn with confidence: someone to whom he could entrust his essential questions; someone from whom he could expect a true response. ... Each one of us must be distinguished by an accessibility similar to that of Christ. Young people should find no difficulty in approaching the Priest, and should discover in him the same openness, benevolence and availability with regard to the problems troubling them. Even when by temperament he is a little shy or reserved, the priest’s attitude should help him to overcome the resistances that derive from that” (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)
  - But this accessibility is more than just someone who makes external contact easy for them both inside and outside Church. “The accessibility of which Christ gives us as an example consists in something more. The priest ... ought to evoke in young people trust as the confidant of their problems of a fundamental nature, questions regarding their spiritual life and questions of conscience.” (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)
  - He said that this type of friendly confidant should “know how to listen and how to answer. The Master whom the young man questions has in the latter’s eyes a special credibility and authority: moral authority.” (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)
- He was able, as a true friend, credibly to call young people to the commitment of friendship in return.
- In his whole approach, he was trying to model Christ’s interaction with them and to encourage them to be faithful friends in return to Christ.
  - Christ “has become the friend of each one of us, the daily companion, contemporary and close to each person who lives, at whatever moment of human history.”
  - Jesus said during the Last Supper, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” Friends seek a unity of wills, they desire to please each other, they do what may be hard for another. Christ out of friendship gave his life to save his friends’ lives. JP II says that Christ’s example calls us to similar fidelity, love and commitment.
- So this first point deals with our whole orientation toward young people.
  - Those in authority are not called to “lord” our age over them, to be their “bosses” or worse to treat them like “slaves” whose whole existence depends on obeying our every wish.
  - We’re called to love them, to serve them, to treasure them, to be friends to them and to model for them true friendship in return.
  - John Paul II is not saying that we need to look at them as our equals. Friendships can have a vertical dimension in which one friend’s contributions are simply greater than the others. But friendship does recognize that there is a two way street, that

both give and that both receive, and to make a commitment to accompany the young person patiently along the path of maturity, to be a guide, like Virgil in the Aeneid, on the way upward toward heaven, toward holiness, toward eternity.

- **(2) Remind young people that they are capable of holiness and greatness in life and love.**
  - So the first tip has to do with us who want to help young people. The second focuses on the young people themselves and it's central to our theme of guiding young people on the path of sanctity. JP II firmly believed that young people are truly capable of holiness, they're capable of greatness, they're capable of the sincere, disinterested gift of self.
    - He believed they were capable not just "later," "in the future," but now.
    - For that reason, he believed that young people could in fact set examples for us about the path to sanctity.
  - In this regard, it's easy to point to the beatification of two of the young Fatima seers, Francisco and Jacinta, in Fatima in 2000.
    - He said during his homily that this shows that even the very young — both died before they were teenagers — are capable of holiness.
    - They were not martyrs, but saints, whose heroic virtues were established for all.
    - They responded to Mary's call to pray, to do reparation and penance, and, even though it was hard, they did it. Tremendous gift of self, by Francisco, even for the Pope.
  - John Paul II also cited the example of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, whose "little way" was something that people of all ages, but especially the young, could follow. In declaring her a doctor of the Church in 1997, despite the fact that she never went to high school!, he declared that she was an "eminent teacher" in the faith. She got the most important part, that we're all called to be love in the heart of the Church, to be humble, to be little.
  - Perhaps the greatest example was Mary, who as a teenager said a full-hearted yes to the Lord's call and changed the history of the world..
- **(3) Challenge young people to greatness**
  - Because young people are capable of greatness, Pope John Paul II challenged them to greatness. This is our third point.
  - "Challenge" is one of his favorite terms. He uses it almost every address to young people, and sometimes, many times.
    - He acknowledges and describes the challenge of the Gospel, the challenge of discipleship, how Christ challenges us. It's a tone that is meant to inspire the young people to meet the challenge with God's help.
    - He challenges them to be "brave," "strong," to "have courage." — The disciple needs the virtue of courage and he's confident that they have it.
    - He's communicating that he knows they're capable of this confidence. He saw in the valor of so many of his young contemporaries during the war and occupation the capacity of young people for this type of bravery and heroism.
    - Allied to bravery, he tells them "don't be afraid." He acknowledges their fears. He often names those fears. He tells them not to be afraid to trust in Christ. Not to be afraid to follow him. Not to be afraid to be the morning watchmen for a new millennium. Not to be afraid to break out of comfortable and routine modes of living. Not to be afraid to love purity. Not to be afraid to seek after fair love. Not to be afraid to be saints. But he reminds them that courage is not the absence of fear, but the capacity to do what we should despite our fears.
    - In Central Park in 1995: "Like Mary, you must not be afraid to allow the Holy Spirit to help you become intimate friends of Christ. Like Mary, you must put aside any fear, in order to *take Christ to the world* in whatever you do – in marriage, as single people in the world, as students, as workers, as professional people. Christ wants to

go to many places in the world, and to enter many hearts, *through you*. ... Stand up for the life of the aged and the handicapped, against attempts to promote assisted-suicide and euthanasia! *Stand up for marriage and family life! Stand up for purity!* Resist the pressures and temptations of a world that too often tries to ignore a most fundamental truth: that every life is a gift from God our Creator, and that we must give an account to God of how we use it either for good or evil.

- Alongside this challenge, he frames faith as an adventure. Discipleship is not boring, but invigorating. It's like an uphill hike with Christ, up the way of the Cross. It's a particularly noble adventure. He knows young people are attracted naturally to these adventures, which capture their imagination. The Pope says that following Christ, putting out into the deep trusting him, is the greatest adventure of all.
- He admitted that there's a temptation among many who work with young people to try to water down the faith and he vigorously resisted this temptation.
  - He did it first with the young people themselves:
    - He admits that it's sometimes hard to believe in the Gospel and to live it, but he says they're capable of it.
    - There's a difficult path, the path of the Cross, the path of the seed falling to the ground. It's the path of the beatitudes, the path of a love that gives its life for others.
    - He had a dramatic encounter with young people in Holland in June of 1985. This was one of his more difficult apostolic pilgrimages. Many of the people, including Catholics, were outright hostile. He took a lot of the young person's questions and then responded with great candor, love and challenge to the questions they had given him:
    - "Dear friends, allow me to be very frank with you. ... Are you really sure that the idea you have of Christ fully corresponds to the reality of his person? The Gospel, in truth, presents us with a very demanding Christ who invites us to a radical conversion of heart, to detachment from earthly goods, to the pardon of offenses, to the love of enemies, to the patient endurance of abuses, and even to the sacrifice of one's life for love of neighbor. In particular, concerning the sexual sphere, the firm position taken by him in defense of the indissolubility of marriage and the condemnation pronounced even regarding simple adultery of the heart are well known. And how can we fail to be struck by the precept to "gouge out one's eye" or "cut off one's hand" if these members are an occasion of 'scandal.'" Having these precise Gospel references, is it realistic to imagine a permissive Christ in the realm of married life, in the question of abortion, of pre-marital, extra-marital or homosexual relations? ... In her teaching the Church never pronounces a judgment regarding concrete persons. But at the level of principles she must distinguish good from evil. Permissiveness doesn't make man happy." (6/3/85 Dutch Youth)
    - "Young friends, this then is my response: love Christ and accept the demands which the Church makes upon you in his name, because they are the demands which come from God, the Creator and Redeemer of man. Accept these demands in your lives and you will discover their value." (6/3/85 Dutch Youth)
  - He did it also with those who are responsible for the young.
    - He said to the U.S. Bishops in the Sept 1993 ad limina, "Don't water down the faith. Strengthen it!" He encouraged them to listen, to teach, to encourage.

- “We must not be afraid of challenging the young. It can happen that one of them may go away ‘saddened’ [like the RYM], when he or she seems unable to face some demand. Nevertheless, sadness of this sort can also be ‘salvific.’ Sometimes the young must make progress through such experiences of salvific sadness, so as gradually to reach the truth and that joy which the truth gives.” (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)
- “Besides, the young know that the true good cannot be had ‘cheaply’; it must ‘cost.’” (4/1/85 Letter to Priests)
- **(4) Acknowledge and engage their questions and their search for meaning and happiness.**
  - As we saw in his interaction with the Dutch youth, he readily acknowledges that youth is a time of asking a lot of question and he’s not afraid of them. In fact, he sees in their questions as the search for meaning and for happiness, which is the desire for love, for God, for holiness. .
  - Youth is the age of discovery of questions. Prior to WYD 1988, he said it’s a time of discovering.
    - Himself
    - Personality
    - Meaning of existence
    - Reality of Good and Evil
    - The world of Nature
    - Jesus!
  - Every WYD began with listening to their questions, with hearing from them.
  - “When young people cease to pose questions, they cease to be young. I would now like to give as clear a response as possible to the questions you have put to me.” (7/1/85 Belgium)
  - He met them where they were at and helped them search for the answer. He treated them like a guide, rather than a boss. He often made the questions his own. “We wonder why?”
  - He knows that for them the questions are urgent. Like the RYM, they’re searching for answers to the questions of why they’re here or where they’re going. He knows that like Augustine, their hearts will remain restless until they rest in God.
  - He’s convinced that if they seek the truth, they will find the truth and find that the truth has a name, Jesus.
  - He enters into a dialogue with them.
  - He acknowledges even their criticisms, particularly of the Church.
    - “In the Church there are certainly some things to be criticized and there are occasionally unpleasant and painful things; this is due to the fact that she is also a community of imperfect and sinful men. Nevertheless, I challenge you today: Love your Church! In spite of all her defects, she is still bound to announce God’s Word to you, she gives you the unique encounters with Jesus Christ in the sacraments, and she helps you to overcome life’s trials with human dignity and in a Christian way.”
    - “Do not limit yourselves to looking at the wrinkles of the Church; we are all responsible for her wrinkles. Do not look to her only for a reflection of yourselves. She is the sacrament of a salvation which comes from beyond, she is the efficacious sign of Jesus Christ.” (7/1/85 Belgium)
    - “You have let me know that you often consider the Church an institution which does nothing but promulgate regulations and laws. You think that she puts up many barriers in various fields; sexuality, the structure of the Church, the place of women in the Church.” (6/3/85 Dutch Youth). But he gives a response: “The Church is you; the Church is all of us. Never speak of the Church as I you were an external person, but rather in your position as committed persons within the Church. . . . I should likewise ask you not to approach the Church in such a way that you can no

longer listen to her. You must not close yourselves off. ... As in a family, we should practice patience with one another... and respect.”

- (5) **Try to respond to their questions by bringing them to Christ**
  - “You asked me about the meaning of life. This meaning is not an idea nor some other thing: it is rather a person. It is Jesus Christ. If you want to awaken to life, you must awaken to Jesus Christ. He gives your life meaning, in good times as well as bad.” (9/23/85 Liechtenstein)
  - “He — Christ — is your answer.”(2/18/85, Venezuela).
  - “Dear friends, continue to believe. The secret to the solution of the difficulties you have mentioned, and of every other difficulty, lies in faith.... Here, dear young friends, is the secret of a Christian life which is both coherent and joyous: the secret lies in a sincere, personal, deep love for Christ” (6/3/85 Dutch Youth)
  - “Love enables us to propose what is good. Jesus looked at his young questioner in the Gospel and said to him: follow me.” The good that we can propose to young people is always expressed in this exhortation: Follow Christ! We have no other good to propose; no one has a better good to propose. To say “follow Christ!” means, above all, try to find yourself as a person. For as the Council teaches, it is precisely Christ who fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his highest calling.”
  - He points them to the falsities out there. New Orleans 1987:
    - “When Saint Paul says, "Let no one deceive you", he is in effect saying: Do not believe anyone who contradicts Jesus or his message which is transmitted to you by the Church, Jesus speaks to you young people and tells you the value of meekness, mercy and humility. Other voices in the world will immediately shout out: "weakness!". In the Gospel Jesus emphasizes the value of honesty, uprightness, justice and fairness. But when you practice these virtues, you are liable to be accused of being "naive". Jesus and his Church hold up to you God's plan for human love, telling you that sex is a great gift of God that is reserved for marriage. At this point the voices of the world will try to deceive you, with powerful slogans, claiming that you are "unrealistic", "out of it", "backward", even "reactionary". But the message of Jesus is clear: purity means true love and it is the total opposite of selfishness and escape.”
    - Jesus' message applies to all the areas of life. He reveals to us the truth of our lives and all aspects of this truth. Jesus tells us that *the purpose of our freedom is to say "yes" to God's plan for our lives*. What makes our "yes" so important is that we say it freely; we are able to say "no". Jesus teaches us that we are accountable to God, that we must follow our consciences, but that our consciences must be formed according to God's plan for our lives In all our relationships to other people and to the world, Jesus teaches us what we must do, how we must live in order not to be deceived, in order to walk in truth. And today, dear young people, I proclaim to you again Jesus Christ: *the way*, and the truth and the life – your way, *your truth* and your life.
    - It is with the truth of Jesus, dear young people, that you must face the great questions in your lives, as well as the practical problems. The world will try to deceive you about many things that matter: about your faith, about pleasure and material things, about the dangers of drugs. And at one stage or another the false voices of the world will try to exploit your human weakness by telling you that life has no meaning at all for you. The supreme theft in your lives would be if they succeeded in robbing you of hope. They will try, but not succeed if you hold fast to Jesus and his truth
- (6) **Assist them to find Christ where they should but often don't see him.**
  - Christ was not a dead, historical figure, but alive. He recognizes that sometimes the young people don't see Christ alive where they should.

- He tried to bring Christ alive, to show that he is risen, to show that he loves them tremendously.
- In *ad limina* addresses to bishops, he asks bishops to present Christ as alive. He pleads with teachers and parents to do the same.
- He says that Christ is alive in Sacred Scripture
  - God speaks to us in Sacred Scripture.
  - Like Mary, we're called to listen to the word of God and treasure it so that the Word may become flesh in us.
  - To symbolize the "actualization" of the word, during WYDs, JP II would often say, "Let us listen to the word of God together."
- Alive in the sacraments.
  - He calls the sacraments, "signs and means of intimate union with God."
  - Christ is alive in the Eucharist.
    - JP II called us to remember this "stupendous gift" of love, to adore him, to receive him worthily, to take him as living monstrances on Corpus Christi processions wherever we go.
    - "We praised God by participating in Holy Mass on Sundays. Basically there is no better way to sanctify the Lord's day. ... In every Mass we should get to know Jesus better." (9/23/85 Liechtenstein)
  - In the Sacrament of Confession, the Lord forgives us, forms our consciences and strengthens us.
    - "We praise God when we regularly confess our sins. We should confess our sins because we know that God is merciful. ... I would like to encourage you to rediscover this widely forgotten sacrament. It is worth the effort. Jesus, who forgives sins, will give you the strength to overcome life's difficulties." (9/23/85 Liechtenstein)
- Alive in prayer
  - Prayer is a living dialogue, a two-sided conversation of love. Christ listens to us and speaks to us.
  - He knows us even better than we know ourselves and wants to help us.
  - "Prayer is the most powerful force with which we Christians can oppose the evil forces in the world. Prayer does not only mean that we can tell God all that troubles us. Prayer also means that we become silent in order to hear what God wants to say to us. Therefore, have the courage to pray and to listen to the quiet voice of God in stillness." (9/23/85 Liechtenstein)
- Alive in the Church
  - The Pope calls young people to love the Church because Christ loves the Church as his bride.
  - Christ gave himself up for her to make her holy.
  - We find Christ in the Church and are called to love Christ in the Church.
  - "The Church has so much to offer young people."
- Alive in others
  - "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do unto me."
  - Jesus identifies with others.
  - In loving them, we're loving him.
  - He particularly called young people to love Christ in the poor and handicapped.
- Alive, beside us, in our day to day struggles.
  - We find Christ on the Cross!
  - He's there with us helping us to carry our crosses.

- Alive in nature
  - Nature is a book written by our Creator that we're called to "read," so as to come to know the Creator better.
  - It's like his poem, The Source, in which all the streams lead us up the mountain toward God.
- **(7) Teach them to discover the real meaning of love in Christ and assist and encourage them to imitate his commitment and self-giving.**
  - JP II recognizes that they're made in the image and likeness of God who is love.
  - True happiness and love can be found only in the free gift of self.
  - "Since you are in the image and likeness of god, your life may not exist only or yourselves, but must be a gift, a present for others. ... With this openness to God and to men, you will reach the realization of your personality." 2/18/85, Venezuela)
  - The pope wants to acknowledge their desire for love and point them to where they will truly find it, Christ, who first loved them and showed them by his words and deeds what real love is.
  - He wanted them to bring their love to Christ rather than allow "love" to bring them away from Christ.
  - Boston 1979: . And now coming back to the story of the young man in the Gospels, we see that he heard the call—"Follow me"—but that he "went away sad, for he had many possessions". The sadness of the young man makes us reflect. We could be tempted to think that many possessions, many of the goods of this world, can bring happiness. We see instead in the case of the young man in the Gospel that his many possessions had become an obstacle to accepting the call of Jesus to follow him. He was not ready to say *yes* to Jesus, and *no* to self, to say *yes* to love and *no* to escape. Real love is demanding. I would fail in my mission if I did not clearly tell you so. For it was Jesus—our Jesus himself—who said : "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (Jn 15 :14). Love demands effort and a personal commitment to the will of God. It means discipline and sacrifice, but it also means joy and human fulfillment. Dear young people : do not be afraid of honest effort and honest work; do not be afraid of the truth. With Christ's help, and through prayer, you can answer his call, resisting temptations and fads, and every form of mass manipulation. Open your hearts to the Christ of the Gospels—to his love and his truth and his joy. Do not go away sad!
  - Dilecti Amici
    - We learn to know other human beings, in order to become more fully human through our capacity for "self- giving": for becoming men and women "for others" . This truth about man-this anthropology-has its incomparable culmination in Jesus of Nazareth. ... Remember that it is a question of a two- way relationship. God responds also with the most "free gift of self", a gift which in biblical language is called "grace". Strive to live in the grace of God!
- **(8) Affirm their freedom and help them form themselves in true freedom.**
  - The mature and sincere gift of self can only happen through the responsible use of freedom.
  - He affirms their freedom and challenges them to use it well.
  - He proposes. He doesn't impose. He often uses the word, "invite" and "invitation." It keeps them thinking about having to choose to accept the invitation Christ gives them, that the Pope and the Church on behalf of Christ, gives them.
  - This is obviously a tough thing for some people in working with young people, because it requires great patience to form young people's freedom. It is enticingly easier just to tell them what to do and to punish them when they do not. But it doesn't help them. Resentment builds because of a lack of being heard, because of a lack of being trusted.

- He laid out for them the dangers and trusted them maturely to make the choice to avoid them. He wanted them to be aware, but he realized that he needed to treat them like adults. He wasn't an overprotective Holy Father
- New Orleans 1987: "You young people are proud to live in a free country and you should be grateful to God for *your freedom*. But even though you can come and go as you like, and do what you want, you are not really free if you are living under the power of error or falsehood, or deceit or sin. Only Jesus Christ can make you fully free through his truth. And that is why he said: "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (*Ibid.* 8, 32. 36). And that is why he added: "if the Son frees you, you will really be free". Dear young people: the whole message of Jesus in the Gospels and through his Church helps you to discover who you really are, to discover all the dimensions of your lives."
- To form their freedom, he obviously had to teach them the dangers out there. But he treated the young people as intelligent enough to see the dangers and want to avoid them.
  - He teaches them about the real issues at stake in the use of their freedom — their whole future.
  - He indicates to them the path to which Christ calls them.
  - But he then reminds them that the choice is theirs. Story of St. Florian's as a young priest. People wanted him to tell them what they should do. He would always talk to them about the various issues at stake, to weigh the alternatives, but then tell them, "you must choose." That was part of the young people's growth in maturity, to take their freedom seriously.
  - He also mentions the false prophets out there, enticing them with erroneous notions of human freedom and easy allurements. Freedom is not the ability to do whatever we want, but the capacity to do what we ought to do.
- He doesn't force them to choose the Lord, or scare them into keeping commandments out of a fear of punishment, but proposes the love of the Lord, the real challenge of the Gospel in all its fullness, and leaves the choice to the young people, knowing, confidently, that it corresponds to their deepest longings.
- Implicit in all of this is that he trusts the young people to make the right decision and he trusts that the Lord will help them with grace. He's not naïve. He knows from his work as a confessor that many will misuse their freedom, but he doesn't focus on that. Like a good coach who knows that his quarterback will occasionally throw an interception, he reminds the quarterback that he knows he can throw the tough touchdown as well and that's what he stresses until the quarterback begins to believe in himself and live up to the coach's trust and expectations
- **(9) Remind them of their real importance and responsibility in the Church now.**
  - Young people are not just part of the future of the Church, but a crucial part of the Church right now. They are a great gift to the Church.
  - Every address has one action item or another relative to their role in the Church, in the new evangelization, as the heralds of the new dawn or of the new springtime.
  - The Pope tells them, "It's not enough just to belong to the Church."
  - Denver: At this stage of history, the liberating message of the Gospel of Life has been put into your hands. And the mission of proclaiming it to the ends of the earth is now passing to your generation. Like the great Apostle Paul, you too must feel the full urgency of the task: "Woe to me if I do not evangelize" (*1Cor 9,16*). *Woe to you if you do not succeed in defending life.* The Church needs your energies, your enthusiasm, your youthful ideals, in order to make the Gospel of Life penetrate the fabric of society, transforming people's hearts and the structures of society *in order to create a civilization of true justice and love.*
  - Boston 1979: Do I then make a mistake when I tell you, Catholic youth, that it is part of your task in the world and the Church to reveal the true meaning of life where hatred,

neglect or selfishness threaten to take over the world? Faced with problems and disappointments, many people will try to escape from their responsibility : escape in selfishness, escape in sexual pleasure, escape in drugs, escape in violence, escape in indifference and cynical attitudes. But today, I propose to you the option of love, which is the opposite of escape. If you really accept that love from Christ, it will lead you to God. Perhaps in the priesthood or religious life; perhaps in some special service to your brothers and sisters: especially to the needy, the poor, the lonely, the abandoned, those whose rights have been trampled upon, or those whose basic needs have not been provided for. Whatever you make of your life, let it be something that reflects the love of Christ. The whole People of God will be all the richer because of the diversity of your commitments. In whatever you do, remember that Christ is calling you, in one way or another, to the service of love: the love of God and of your neighbor.

- Christ trusts the young and so we should too. The pope acknowledges that many do not think that the young are capable of fulfilling serious spiritual responsibilities, but he does. This leads to the last point.

○ **(10) Fill them with hope and inspire them with the confidence of Christ in them to fulfill their mission.**

- 2 Cor 7:4: I have great confidence in you, great pride in you. I am filled with encouragement, overflowing with joy.
- LA 1987: I often say that you who are young bring hope to the world. The future of the world shines in your eyes. Even now, you are helping to shape the future of society. I have always placed high hopes in young people.”
- New Orleans, 1987: “I know that you are very much conscious of having a special mission in this world, of being partners in the mission of the Church. I also know that in fulfilling your mission you are willing to give, you are willing to share, and you are willing to serve. And you are willing to do all this, together, not alone! In this you are like Jesus: Jesus gave and he served and he was never alone.”
- “You are the hope of the Church, of the world. You are my hope!”
- But this hope comes from their capacity to respond to Christ’s call:
  - “Dear young people, the future of society and of the Church lies in your hands, in your capacity to discover your vocation and to fulfill it: it lies in the response that you will give with strength and commitment to God’s call.” (7/29/85 Treviso)
  - “What will be tomorrow is already shining in youth. But this future does not fall into your laps as a ripe fruit. It is entrusted to you to be built up in a responsible way. ... What there will be ... the day after tomorrow... depends in ever greater measure on you. It will depend on the general lines of your life and on your commitment, on the condition of your moral knowledge and on your conscience, whether the dream of a better world will come true” (6/17/85 Luxembourg)
  - “The future can be yours if you live the present with serious commitment. You will be tomorrow what you have been able to be today, since the future will be only the fruit of your being able to give meaning to the present. Youth conditions the irreversible choices of adulthood.” (3/13/85 Audience)

• Conclusion

- In talking about forming young people to respond to their vocation to love, John Paul II regularly applied it to marriage. As we get ready to conclude all of our reflections on the theology of the body in the life and ministry of priests, I’d like to take up one of his more systematic attempts to do so, which provides an effective synthesis of this conference.
- In his letter to the youth of the world in 1985, Dilecti Amici, he said about marriage,
  - “Against this vast background that your youthful plan of life acquires in relation to the idea of the Christian vocation, I wish to examine, together with you young people ... the

question that in a certain sense is at the heart of the youth of all of you. This is one of the central questions of human life, and at the same time one of the central themes of reflection, creativity and culture. It is also one of the main biblical theme," the great sacrament of marriage. Youth is the period when this great theme affects in an experimental and creative way the soul and body of every young woman and young man ... and on the horizon of a young heart a new experience occurs: the experience of love, which from the beginning has to be included in that plan of life which youth spontaneously creates and forms.

- In each separate case all of this has its own unrepeatable subjective expression, its affective richness, indeed its metaphysical beauty.
  - At the same time, in all of this there is contained a powerful exhortation not to distort this expression, not to destroy this treasure and not to disfigure this beauty. Be convinced that this call [to fair love] comes from God himself, who created man "in his own image and likeness" precisely "as man and woman". This call flows from the Gospel and makes itself heard in the voice of young consciences, if they have preserved their simplicity and purity: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Yes, through that love which is born in you-and wishes to become a part of your whole plan of life-you must see God who is love. And so I ask you not to break off your conversation with Christ in this extremely important phase of your youth; I ask you rather to commit yourselves even more. When Christ says "Follow me," his call can mean: "I call you to still another love"; but very often it means: "Follow me," follow me who am the Bridegroom of the Church who is my bride; come, you too become the bridegroom of your bride, you too become the bride of your spouse. Both of you become sharers in that mystery, that Sacrament, which the Letter to the Ephesians says is something great: great "in reference to Christ and the Church" Much depends on the fact that you, on this path too, should follow Christ; that you should not flee from him, when you are occupied with this matter which you rightly consider the great event of your heart, a matter that exists only in you and between you.
  - I want you to believe and to be convinced that this great matter has its definitive dimension in God, who is love-in God, who in the absolute unity of his divinity is also a communion of persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
  - To set out on the path of the married vocation means to learn married love day by day, year by year: love according to soul and body, love that "is patient, is kind, that does not insist on its own way... and does not rejoice at wrong": love that "rejoices in the right", love that "endures all things. It is precisely this love that you young people need if your married future is to "pass the test" of the whole of life. And precisely this test is part of the very essence of the vocation which, through marriage, you intend to include in the plan of your life.
  - And so I do not cease to pray to Christ and to the Mother of Fair Love for the love that is born in young hearts. Many times in my life it has been my task to accompany in a sense more closely this love of young people. Thanks to this experience I have come to understand just how essential the matter that we are dealing with here is, how important and how great it is. I think that to a large extent the future of humanity is decided along the paths of this love, initially youthful love, which you and she, you and he discover along the paths of your youth. This can be called a great adventure, but it is also a great task.
- So the formation of young people to respond to their vocation to love like Christ loves, to love fairly, to love in an unselfish, sincere and sacrificial way is crucial not only in their individual lives, but for the future of the Church and all of humanity. Blessed John Paul II would obviously hope that we, his brother priests, would give it the priority it deserves and engage ourselves in this demanding but rewarding pastoral activity. He stands as an intercessor in heaven ready to intercede for us. We ask him to pray for us and let's commit ourselves to pray for each other.